1: Mi Mi Khaing I-5 (no date) 1946 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4

CHAPTER TWELVE

WE lived at Thaton for two years, and then my father became ill and had to be moved to Rangoon for treatment. This meant the packing up of the household, and when my father died shortly afterwards, my mother never went back to live at the great echoing house, but stayed in Rangoon to be near our schools. Thus the long period of our district life came to an end. From now onwards, my mother and sisters were to become merged in the increasing company of *Yan-gon-thu*, Rangoon dwellers, but we saw nothing of this life yet. School walls and student interests at the University enfolded us, and our holidays were spent at Ye and other country places. I was already at the University by this time, after having spent nine years at an English school—nine years during which the alternating periods of school and holidays transported me by turns into two completely different worlds, each kept shut off from the other by childish self-consciousness and reticence. The educational system in Burma did not have a homogeneous structure owing to the different media of instructions in use, and I have always felt that we were the particular victims of this shortcoming. Mistakenly sent to exclusive schools, we were denied the company of a great crowd of Burmeseplay mates during the greater part of these nine years.

Classified according to the language of instruction, there were three types of schools in Burma—the Vernacular, the Anglo-Vernacular and the European. There were over 5,000 recognized vernacular schools in Burma, which contributed towards raising the literacy of the poorest classes, but did little more. The pupils could not hope to continue their studies at the University where the medium of instruction was English, and, although high-school classes were introduced after 1931, they did not qualify a student for any post except that of teaching in such a school. There were few well-paid posts open to those without a knowledge of English.

The great bulk of schools in Burma were Anglo-Vernacular schools, where instruction was carried on in Burmese, but English was taught as a subject; and in the highest classes, some of the text-books used were in English, as the translation of schoolbooks into Burmese was still at an infant stage. My experiences of teaching at the Teachers' Training College, Rangoon, where we had an Anglo-Vernacular school for model

971 teaching and practical training of educational students, were a fair
177. example of the multiple forms of instruction prevailing. I taught in
87 Burmese from a text-book which had not yet been translated into Bur-
•198 mese, as the subject, Home Science, was a new one. I explained the lesson and questioned the pupils in Burmese, but when summing up the points on the blackboard, wrote in English, so that the copying children could more easily correlate the matter with the contents of their English text-books. When answering examinations they were free to write in English or Burmese, and there were many who had a deficient knowledge of English but preferred to write in this language because the text-book had been in English. Among the educational students taking notes, also, there might be included a few Anglo-Burman students who did not know Burmese well. Up to 1935 it was still possible to enter Rangoon University without any knowledge of Burmese, and one grade of the Burmese "lectures" there started with the learning of the alphabet, progressing to the stage of writing sentences by the end of the two-year course. Almost all towns with a population of more than 5,000 inhabitants had a girls' school and a mixed school of the Anglo-Vernacular type —either government or mission or national schools, which later received government aid. The majority of the students at the University was from these Anglo-Vernacular schools.

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Finally there were the European Code schools, teaching in English with Burmese as an alternative second language to French or even to Additional English in the high school, until about 1933 when Burmese was made the compulsory second language and the standard of it was also raised to approximate more closely to the Anglo-Vernacular standard.

When my brother and I were first to be sent to school, about 22 years ago, government officials like my father were still under the impression that education in an English school would give a child a great advantage in making his way in Burma. All the examinations for higher government services were conducted in English, and all well-paid posts required a knowledge of English. We were therefore sent to a European Code school, although such schools were started primarily for English-speaking children. Owing to the peculiar social conditions prevailing in the schools at the time, we underwent acute misery during all the years that we were there.

Such schools, both for boys and girls, were set up in the big towns, Rangoon, Mandalay, Moulmein, Maymyo, Toungoo, etc. Most of them were mission or religious schools, aided by the government and by the diocese or a religious mission.

Very few Burmans at that time sent daughters to such schools, though sons were sent commonly enough, and the distinctions made against the stray natives who entered the rolls began from the moment of entry. The diocesan schools insisted on our adopting English Christian and surnames, from an aversion to including heathen names on their registers. Burman Buddhist were thus transformed into orthodox Christian names: Sir Htoon Aung Gyaw and his brothers became a family of Thompsons, Sir Paw Tun was happily converted into Potter, and my brother U Sett Kaing, with less relevance, became Robert Downs. Thus many distinguished Burmans spent years under these assumed names. The Roman Catholic schools were kinder. They merely required us to adopt a system of first name and surname, which does not exist among Burmans, and wished us to pick a Christian first name so that the nuns could pronounce it easily. Thus we got Kathleen Maung, Grace Nee, Sarah Tin Gyi, the daughters of U Maung Maung, U Nee and U Tin Gyi. My own name Mi Mi Khaing was brought into line as Mamie Kaing.

We went to a Roman Catholic convent where the nuns made no attacks on Buddhism and no attempts to proselytise us—despite which I became attracted to their religion for a few years—but with sincere conviction and fervour they condemned everything else in us that was different from the great mass of Anglo-Burmans who filled the school. A good proportion of these children were the children of Englishmen who, not having entered into a legal marriage with the Burmese mothers, had now left mother and child with a sum of money which the kind nuns stretched to cover as much schooling as was possible. These and other Anglo-Burman children were encouraged to swank over us with childish cruelty about our darker skins, flat noses, and uncurling hair. They did this to such an extent that many of us in our minority and our helpless misery, branded our distinguished parents as being "half Burmese and half English", in order to gain their good opinion. We were told that Burmese food was stinking, that the use of oil for the hair was dirty and insanitary, and when young sisters ran after their elder ones calling Ma Ma, Elder Sister, all the children hooted with laughter. No wonder that my sister Mya Mya during her first weeks at school would sit by the gate, evening after evening, singing mournfully:

May May yay-ay
La pa taw
Kyi-gan ta-maw maw.

2:Scott G-5 (1870's-1909)1910 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4

matter of fact, the more noise there is going on, the more work there is being got through. 876 872

Doubtless it is a primitive method—doubtless there are thick-headed boys with tough lungs who shout out the ka gyi, ka gwe (the A, B, C) with but the slightest portion of it remaining in their brains. There must be, because sometimes a boy takes a year to get through the alphabet (called the thin-bon-gyi, the "great basket of learning"), the combination of vowel symbols, and the alterations of sound effected by the union of consonants, all of which are mere materials, and only a very small portion of the complicated system of the language. Nevertheless everybody learns in the end, and then they are set to read in the same way, and gradually advance in the immemorial regulation subjects. The first books—all the books, in fact, put in the boys' hands—are religious. They learn the five universal commandments, the five subsidiary rules, the Pali formulæ to be employed at the pagoda—pattering them over till they pour out of the lips with the fluency and precision of water out of a pump. When there are a number at the same stage in their studies, they repeat their lesson word for word after the teacher, sitting in wide rows before him, and all chanting with the same emphasis and apparently in the same key. The effect is very singular when a string of sonorous Pali versicles is being mouthed over in the striking intoned recitative peculiar to these formulæ. The twenty or thirty boys crouching down on their knees, their little heads every now and then bowing down to the ground over their hands joined in supplication, the yellow-robed monk sitting cross-legged on the dais before them, repeating in abrupt, jerky fashion the clauses of the form of worship, which the childish voices instantly catch up, forms a scene which never loses its novelty and attractiveness. 872 779 198

The little schoolboy slowly learns all these formulæ. Even near to and in the larger towns of Lower Burma the amount of secular learning, arithmetic, and so on that is learnt, is of the most meagre possible description. All relates to the tenets of religion—to the existences and teachings of the Lord Buddha. The things thus impressed on the youthful mind sink deep into the memory, and leave their mark 872 779

2:Scott G-5 (1870's-1909)1910 AP1 Burma
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Lower Burma

792 553 775 561 In recognition of this new-gained power the novice drops his secular name and receives a bwè, an honorific title, to mark that it is now open to him to escape from suffering. The name lapses when he returns to the world again, but it is sufficient that he has once borne it. He may now add to his kan, merit, and gain for himself a glorious new life by good works.

[198] This is what is meant by calling the ceremony a baptism. The bwè are almost invariably Pali, or Burmanised Pali names, and follow the same rules with regard to initial letters as the lu nāmé. Thus a Maung Po Myat, born on Thursday, might take the name of Pyinya-Zawta, while the bwè of a Sunday child, Maung An, would be Adesa. This religious or Buddhist (on the analogy of Christian) name is, of course, retained by the regular members of the monastery, and a monk is never addressed by any other when a name is used at all. When he becomes old a U is added, as U Adesa, but it must not be forgotten that [576] the use of a person's name in addressing him is considered very far from being polite in Burma, especially to one of rank and dignity such as a mendicant. On the other hand, one who has returned to the world never uses the bwè, not even when he accomplishes some great religious work such as the foundation of a pagoda, which according to a comforting belief ensures passage to Ne'ban after death.

The entry into the monastic order is therefore certainly the most important event in the life of a Burman, since only under the robe of the recluse and in the abandonment of the world can he completely fulfil the law and hope to find the way to eventual deliverance from the misery of ever-recur- [796] ring existences. The popular time for the ceremony is just at the beginning of Wā, the Buddhist Lent, which lasts from July to October, roughly speaking. Strict Buddhists make their sons stay throughout the whole Wā. During that season feasts, though they do occur, are very much discountenanced, and dramatic performances are energetically denounced by the religious.

792 561 184 177-84 According to the letter of the law the intending probationers should have reached the age of fifteen, but this regulation has almost entirely lapsed in Lower Burma, among other reasons chiefly because that is just the most

2:Scott G-5 (1870's-1909)1910 AP1 Burma
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breakfast ready prepared for them when they return from their morning's walk, and are ready to set to with healthy appetites. This question of Sybaritism is a chief source of dispute between the rival sects of Mahā and Sulagandi.

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Breakfast done, they wash out the begging-bowls, and chant a few lauds before the image of the Buddha, meditating for a short time on kindness and affection. During the succeeding hour the scholars are allowed to play about, but must not make a noise, or indulge in quarrelsome games; the religious pass the time in leisurely conversation, or in any other way they please; the kyaung po-go usually has visits from old people, who come to pay their respects, or perhaps the kyaung-tagā, the founder of the monastery, the patron of his benefice, comes to consult with him on various matters, or to converse about religion and good works. The etiquette observed on these occasions is always very stately and ceremonious. Whoever approaches, whether it be the poorest villager, the founder of the monastery, or the governor of the district, all alike must prostrate themselves three times before the yahan, and, with uplifted hands, say, "In order that all the sins I have committed, in thought, in word, or in deed, may be pardoned to me, I prostrate myself three times, once in honour of the Buddha, again in honour of the Law, and thirdly in honour of the Assembly, the three precious things. By so doing, I hope to be preserved from the three calamities, from the four states of punishment; and from the five enemies, fire, water, thieves, governors (literally translated burdens), and malevolent people." The sayā replies: "As a reward for his merit and his obeisances, may the supporter (tagā) be freed from the three calamities, the four states of punishment, the five enemies, and from harm of what kind soever. May all his aims be good and end well; may he advance firmly in the noble path, perfect himself in wisdom, and finally obtain rest in ne'ban." Whenever the visitor addresses the yahan he joins his hands together, and sitting as he does on a mat, slightly bends the body forward, applying the title of payā, or lord, and making use of the honorific forms of speech specially reserved for the religious. The mendicant on his part calls the layman, of whatever

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Silver moonbeams
Cast their chill gleams,
But to make black darkness vanish,
Sweet sleep from my babe's eyes banish?
Fairies wiled him,
Dreams beguiled him,
In his cradle wrapped so snugly,
Cradle carved with nayas[1] ugly,
Carved with Nats and Kings and Princes,
Every splendour that evinces
Royal state and princely usance.
There he slept, when what a nuisance!
Comes the light
To affright
And scare him back to home from elfin land.

Sweet, my babe, your father's coming,
Rest and hear the songs I'm humming;
He will come and gently tend you,
Rock your cot and safe defend you;
Mother's setting out his dinner—
Oh, you naughty little sinner!
What a yell from such a wee thing,
Couldn't be worse if you were teething.
My sweet round mass of gold,
Now please do what you're told.
Be quiet and good,
As nice boys should.
Oh, you plaguy, nasty brat!
I must call the great big cat,
He will come and squeeze and bite,
Scratch and eat you up outright.
Puss, puss, puss, you great big pussy!
Here's a boy so nice and juicy,
Let the mice have one night's pleasure,
You shall eat him at your leisure.

Nasty, naughty, noisy baby,
If the cat won't, Nats will maybe
Come and pinch and punch and rend you.
If they do I won't defend you.
Oh, now please,
Do not tease.
Do be good,
As babies should,
Just one tiny little while;
Try to sleep, or try to smile.

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[1] A naya is a dragon with four legs. The word used here, myat è yin-wè, is specially reserved for royal cradles. The plebeian article is called pa-hket. Throughout, the language is of the most honorific character.

2:Scott G-5 (1870's-1909)1910 AP1 Burma
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The oldest layman assumes the title of disciple to the last inducted pyin-sin, and, with clasped hands, addresses him as payā, the highest title the language affords. The monk's commonest actions, walking, eating, sleeping, are referred to in honorific language, different from that which would be used of a layman, or even of the king, performing the same thing. The highest officials bow down before them, and impose upon themselves the greatest sacrifices, both of time and money, to build splendid kyaungs for them, and minister to their wants. Finally, the monk's person is sacred and inviolable. Nothing he does can subject him to the civil law. He bears the title of Thagiwin Mintha, Thagiwin Prince, as the heir of the scion of Kapilawut, and receiver of his inheritance.

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increase in earnestness and purity of heart, and am freed from the Four States of Punishment; from the Three Evil Things, starvation, plague, and warfare; from the Eight Chambers of Hell; and from the Five Enemies. And at the end, when the last existence has come for me, may I pass into Ne'ban." 782 788

Such "prayers" are addressed not merely to the image, but to the whole pagoda, and not even on the platform of the latter. It is common for the pious at any period of the day to repeat their devotions simply in the direction of the pagoda, and often from a spot where hardly even the summit of it can be seen. The pilgrims to the Shwe Dagôn Payā in Rangoon prostrate themselves at intervals from the moment they catch sight of its glittering spire; but they repeat nothing further than the above, or some more fanciful formula, such as this: "Awgatha, Awgatha, Awgatha, I worship the footsteps of the great, the brilliant Buddha, to whom even the savage hunters turn, and the fierce dragons on the mountain tops and in the abysses of the hills. In the far land of Thiho (Ceylon) there, where, in the wilderness of woods, far from human dwellings, temples and pagodas rise up 84,000 in number, in the caves and the deeps; there I worship, there I bow me in devotion." By far the greater number, however, repeat simple Pali sentences, of which they have long forgotten the meaning, if indeed they ever knew it. Many of the pyin-sin can repeat whole books and chapters in the sacred tongue, without having any but a very confused notion of the meaning of what they utter. Yet even this parrot-like performance has its merit, for it brings the mind into a fit state to contemplate the great ideal. A conclusive proof of this is recorded in the Malla Lingaya Wuttu, the life of Shin Gautama. There were many bats who lived in a cave in the time of the last Buddha, Kathapa, and great numbers of yahans were in the habit of resorting to this cave to meditate and give themselves up to devotion. These bats learned to repeat some of the phrases which they heard, but could not understand, and this pious exercise resulted in such benefit to their kan, that on their death they migrated to the seats of nat-dêwas. Afterwards, when Shin Gautama was preaching upon earth, [198] ●

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782 they again appeared upon the seat of man as yahans, and,
788 attending diligently to the precepts of the Law, were the first, as disciples of Thariputra, one of the chief followers of the Buddha, to comprehend the sublime law of the Abhidamma. If dumb creatures then can win such rewards for piety, how much more a man who repeats his sentences with at least a consciousness of what their import is.

● [198] Similar to this feeling with regard to the Pali jargon, of which every Burman knows more or less, according to the length of his stay in the monastery or the depth of his religious sentiments, and prompted by a like idea, is the offering of little nan-tagôn. These prayer-flags—kyet-sha-taing, as they are sometimes called—are made of paper, cut fancifully into figures of dragons, lizards, and the like, with embroidery-work round their edges. In the centre is written some pious reflection or aspiration, and the offerer places it on the shrine. Most of those sold ready composed for the worshipper are in Pali, those which he writes for himself, in Burmese. Samples of these inscriptions are:—

"By means of this paper the offerer will become very strong."

"By the merit of this paper Wednesday's children will be blessed by spirits and men."

"May the man born on Friday gain reward for his pious offering."

"This paper is an offering for people born on any day of the week from Sunday to Saturday."

"May the man born on Monday be freed from sickness and from the Three Calamities."

Very often nothing but the names of certain days of the week are written on the nan-tagôn; but sometimes a friend of humanity, or a man with a particularly large family, covering with their birthdays the whole week, simply writes down the names of the days in any order he pleases. The commonest form at the stalls round about the Shwe Dagôn is this simple, bald list, and indeed Rangoon is particularly badly supplied in this way. There are other small flags or streamers made of coloured cloth, some of them, especially those presented by the Shans, stitched with many

2:Scott G-5 (1870's-1909)1910 AP1 Burma
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exercise of so meritorious a ceremony as the expounding of the Law. Accordingly the great crowd, who have been looking on with much interest at the progress up the taper-lit saungdan, commence generally to prepare for sleep in the zayats which surround the place where the stage is, or failing accommodation there, curl themselves up as comfortably as may be under the bullock-carts which brought them thither. A still greater proportion, however, gather together in circles to have a gossip, and this talk, accompanied by much smoking and chewing of pickled tea and betel, goes on till far into the night. An excuse for the scant reverence paid to the sermon, to which none but a few white-haired men and women listen, is, that what part of it is not in Pali is in such suggagyi, such a lofty and stilted style of Burmese, that no one can follow it. Accordingly the discourse is hurried through and the performers come down, and after putting off their fine clothes receive the congratulations of their friends. The image remains all night in "Tawadeintha," and the following evening the descent is made with similar ceremonial, and so the dramatic part of the festival is concluded.

But this is very far from being the whole of the proceedings. On both days numerous presents are made to the yahans and offerings to the pagodas, and these are carried round about the town and by circuitous routes to the monasteries, so that the greatest amount of pleasure and publicity may accrue to the donors.

Chief among these offerings are always huge spires, some of them fifty feet high, representing Tawadeintha, and similar to that on the summit of the stage platform. They are made of bamboo covered with pasteboard, glittering with gold and silver paper and painted in many colours, and are carried by ten or twenty men, on long bamboo poles. Round about them dance all the youth of the quarter or village they are presented by, young men and girls, all in their brightest clothes. In Rangoon scores of these offerings wend their way to the monasteries under the shadow of the great Shwe Dagôn.

Mingled up in the procession come white umbrellas, gold umbrellas, lofty bamboo poles with gilt balls quivering and swaying at the top, big pasteboard images of nat-dêwas,

2:Scott G-5 (1870's-1909)1910 APl Burma
Burmese AP4

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hension. It may have been an ancient law, but it was not enforced in the last years of the Burmese empire, and it does not seem to have been enforced even in the times of the haughtiest and most unreasonable monarchs, such as Tharrawaddy and Mintaya Gyi. The appellative was perhaps not so common as in British territory; but as far as the law was concerned, the poor man might call himself and his children Shwe as much as he pleased; only he had to be very careful how he used any of the gold he might possess in decorating his person or in adorning his house.

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If the regulations did not apply to the name a man might have, they certainly did to the language he might make use of. Oriental forms of speech in self-depreciation are familiar enough. They are universal with all the nations of the East, and even turn up in the democratic West in the petitions of "your humble, obedient servant." The magniloquent and supreme nga, as applied to one's self, is not peculiar to Burma; while hnin, addressed to an inferior, is only a little more contemptuous than the *Er* of the small German courts. The difference between the various ranks is far more distinctly marked than this in the employment of different forms of speech; an entirely special language as applied to the royal blood, and in a scarcely less adulatory way to the members of the Assembly of the Perfect. A man "dies"; a monk "goes back" to the blissful seats whence he came, or to ne'ban; a king "ascends to the village of Nats"; one of the six heavens of happiness, where the passions still reign, and in the contemplation of which Buddhists find consolation for the otherwise dismal forebodings of their faith. The Buddhist religion is thoroughly democratic. A man only is what he is through his actions in past existences. The accumulation of merits must therefore vastly outweigh the demerits in the kan of a king. However badly he may act in his regal existence, he cannot fall below the lowest seat of the dewas—at least, so official language declares. Similarly, an ordinary man "walks"; a mendicant "stalks," or "strides," or "paces with dignified gait," or whatever may be the English honorific equivalent of the Burmese chwa; while a king "makes a royal progress." The latter expression was emphatically correct as

2:Scott G-5 (1870's-1909)1910 AP1 Burma
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far as personages of the Burmese royal blood were concerned. The descendants of Mahā Thamada never went on their own legs in the open air. If they did not mount an elephant, some official was honoured with the weight of majesty on his back. In the same way, while a humble subject "eats," a pôngyi sônpônpethi "assimilates," or "nourishes his body with the alms of the pious"; and a king demeans himself to nothing less than "ascending to the lordly board." You may "call" or "invite" an ordinary man; to an ascetic you may "suggest an interview"; you would be a reckless man indeed if you sought a formula which in the faintest imaginable way would suggest to a king that you wanted him to come to you. When your visitor departs, if he is on familiar terms, he says, Thwa-mi nŏ, "I say, I'm going," and you politely respond, Thwa-ba, "By all means, go away"; if he stands a little in awe of you, he says, Thwa-daw-mi, "Honoured sir, I take my leave"; on the other hand, when, after a conference with a holy brother, you take your departure, you say, "My lord's servant does obeisance" (literally, "kowtows with his forehead"). When there was a king he did not give you the chance to say anything; he flung out of the throne and disappeared behind a blue curtain, while your eyes were fixed on the ground a couple of feet before you.

And so it goes on through a triple language, which makes Burmese of the palace an unknown tongue to the best foreign scholar. Tales are told of the ludicrous mistakes of men, who to ordinary people could speak Burmese, and therefore imagined they might venture on it with the king. Thus it was with a bluff English manager of one of the numerous mills which King Mindôn built and kept going till he got tired of them. This gentleman, in replying in the affirmative to some remark of the Lord of the Golden Palace, horrified the court by saying hôkde instead of the prescribed tin-ba payah, "I think with your majesty." The expression to palace ears was much the same as if some one were to say to His Majesty the King of England, "Right you are, old cockie." The court language is still kept up by all Burmese in their intercourse with superior officials.

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If the proprieties of language were carefully observed, the regulations as to wearing apparel and ornaments were

2:Scott G-5 (1870's-1909)1910 AP1 Burma
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to the payment of the barbarians. In any case he should not suffer, for the whole sum would be refunded in two months' time. The circumstance, however, seems to have preyed on his mind, for the bodyguard said that his majesty (the elephant) had never been the same since.

There are frequent reports of the capture of white elephants, and special questing parties are sent out every now and then. But the candidates almost invariably fail to satisfy the water test, or the tail is not long enough, or the position of the eye is wrong, and the red ring is wanting. At any rate, genuine "white" elephants are very seldom found. As with the king, when the Sinbyudaw died it was not permissible to say so in as many rude words. It had to be whispered that his majesty had "departed" or "disappeared." He used to get a royal funeral.

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When Mandalay was taken in 1886 the Royal White Elephant was sent down to Rangoon, where he was to have been kept in the Zoological Gardens. But he died immediately after he arrived. There has been no suggestion of the discovery of a White Elephant since.

16:Fielding Hall G-3 (1885-1890) 1898 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4

Can anyone ever tell when the influence of a monk has been other than for pity or mercy? Surely they believe their religion? I did not know how people could believe till I saw them.

Martyrdom—what is martyrdom, what is death, for your religion, compared to living within its commands? Death is easy; life it is that is difficult. Men have died for many things: love and hate, and religion and science, for patriotism and avarice, for self-conceit and sheer vanity, for all sorts of things, of value and of no value. Death proves nothing. Even a coward can die well. But a pure life is the outcome only of the purest religion, of the greatest belief, of the most magnificent courage. Those who can live like this can die, too, if need be—have done so often and often; that is but a little matter indeed. No Buddhist would consider that as a very great thing beside a holy life.

There is another difference between us. We think a good death hallows an evil life; no Buddhist would hear of this for a moment.

The reverence in which a monk—ay, even the monk to-day who was but an ordinary man yesterday—is held by the people is very great. All those who address him do so kneeling. Even the king himself was lower than a monk, took a lower seat than a monk in the palace. He is addressed as 'Lord,' and those who address him are his disciples. Poor as he is, living on daily charity, without any power or authority of any kind, the greatest in the land would dismount and yield the road that he should pass. Such is the people's reverence for a holy life. Never was such voluntary homage

16:Fielding Hall G-3 (1885-1890) 1898 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4

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yielded to any as to these monks. There is a special language for them, the ordinary language of life being too low to be applied to their actions. They do not sleep or eat or walk as do other men.

It seems strange to us, coming from our land where poverty is an offence, where the receipt of alms is a degradation, where the ideal is power, to see here all this reversed. The monks are the poorest of the poor, they are dependent on the people for their daily bread; for although lands may be given to a monastery—as a matter of fact, very few have any at all, and those only a few palm-trees—they have no power at all, either temporal or eternal; they are not very learned, and yet they are the most honoured of all people. Without any of the attributes which in our experience gather the love and honour of mankind, they are honoured above all men.

The Burman demands from the monk no assistance in heavenly affairs, no interference in worldly, only this, that he should live as becomes a follower of the great teacher. And because he does so live the Burman reverences him beyond all others. The king is feared, the wise man admired, perhaps envied, the rich man is respected, but the monk is honoured and loved. There is no one beside him in the heart of the people. If you would know what a Burman would be, see what a monk is: that is his ideal. But it is a very difficult ideal. The Burman is very fond of life, very full of life, delighting in the joy of existence, brimming over with vitality, with humour, with merriment. They are a young people, in the full flush of early nationhood. To them of all

561 removed. Old folks habitually like bitter foods - especially tea
262 leaves. Eating prepared foods left over night is strictly prohibited as a cause of illnesses. Curry must be eaten while it is hot. (There are no apparent reasons - just observation from eating spoild [757] foods). Boiled rice and fried dry fish comprises the standard sick diet in addition to other foods especially prescribed for the care or for giving vigour. It is interesting to note that English foods such 177 as tinned biscuits ("Golden Puff biscuits") or milk preparations 757 ("Hollicks") are preferred for the sick diet by those who can afford 262 them. The "strong" tastes of these foods give strength to the sick person. Lately, western medicines have been recognized as powerful. U Myaing's experiences above show the means by which this idea is established. However, the Burmese doctor is relied on even by families of the administrative class in Rangoon.

759 When a case of sickness seems beyond response to normal treatments, and it has been diagnosed as of a natural cause, the SAY SAYA (medicine-master) is called in. "Foot-hire" at a stiff rate of Rs.5/- for the first visit and 2 or 3 rupees for succeeding visits is paid for this service. "Say-saya, we place the case in your hands" is entoned, to which the doctor replies "If our faith coincides (i.e. patients and doctors) then we will be successful - otherwise we cannot go against Karma". The doctor notes the symptoms, feels forehead for fever, inquires of colour of urine and the course of the disorder. He then chants in verse the diagnosis as "eyes yellow, ● [198] motion irregular, forehead moist - (giving nature of sickness)". The treatment also follows in verse form as a rigid formula prescribing medicines and diet. The doctor is a specialist in one or more types of medicine which he has concocted such as "blood purifying medicine", "fever medicine", "purgative medicine", and he will have [755] been called in because of this specialty. Charmed water is frequently given. Here verse formula is said over a cup of water to give it power.

SAY SAYA are trained when young men as apprentices to older doctors. The training includes memorizing many books giving diagnosis and formulas for curing as well as learning the master's arts.

21: Htin Aung E-5 (ca. 1930) 1937 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4
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of Hindu traders from South India. After the introduction of Buddhism into South India by Asoka in 261 B.C., the traders began to bring Buddhist elements to Thaton. With the establishment in the third or fourth century after Christ of the Hindu kingdoms in Java and Sumatra, Thaton became an important trading centre, and with the rise of a great Buddhist centre at Conjeveram in Madras in the fifth century, the Talaings began to receive religious writings in Pali. From that time onwards, learning was definitely established in the kingdom, and, as a result, a Talaing literature came into being. Anawrahta was interested in Pali only, and therefore when he destroyed the city, he burnt all the manuscripts except those in Pali.[1]

The writing and learning that were thus introduced into Pagan took root at once. Prose and poetry as embodied in the language of the court and in songs had been in existence long before, though unwritten, and now the new learning turned them into written forms and began to develop them. Pali was studied everywhere, and in the newly-built temples with their crowded monastic life, works in Pali on religion, on Pali grammar and prosody, and on the legal code of Manu came to be produced.[2] Translations were also made, and soon Pagan became famous throughout India for its Pali scholarship. But

[1] The Burmese language belongs to the Tibeto-Burmese group, whereas the Talaing belongs to the Mon-Khmar group. In spite of Anawrahta's conquest and in spite of the fact that racially they were cousins, the Talaings became completely merged with the Burmese only in the eighteenth century. The probability of the Sanskrit drama reaching the Talaings is considered in chap. ii.

[2] G. E. Harvey, op. cit., pp. 59, 70.

The most famous for literary activity was the *Kyaukku Ohnmin* temple. Though built perhaps even before Anawrahta, when a corrupted form of Buddhism was prevalent, it is still in an excellent condition (Harvey, p. 17).

The code of Manu was compiled originally in Sanskrit, during the period 200 B.C.–A.D. 200. Since that time it has been one of the chief sources of Hindu law (J. D. Mayne, *Hindu Law*). The Burmese received it in a Talaing-Pali version in which the sacerdotal element had been done away with. That explains why, although Manu is one of the chief sources also of Burmese Buddhist law, it has little in common with Hindu law. The existence of the code as the chief source of Talaing law (Harvey, op. cit., p. 111) raises again the question, how far were the Talaing writings under the influence of Sanskrit and its literature? We shall never know. When Anawrahta destroyed Talaing institutions and historical and literary works, he intended that all knowledge of the past greatness of the Talaings should pass into oblivion so as to smooth his way towards unifying Burma into one single State.

Pali has been, since 1044, the classical language of Burma.

21: Htin Aung E-5 (ca. 1930) 1937 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4

But
there never was any attempt to imitate the Pali language and its literature in the vernacular, and Burma offers no parallel to the controversy among English Renaissance scholars over the merits and demerits of the vernacular.

The period of Pagan's ascendancy marked the zenith of Burmese greatness and civilization. It was a great centre of trade, and visitors from afar talked of the glory that was Pagan. Its supremacy was unquestioned by the whole of Burma, which had been united into a kingdom for the first time. It even demanded and probably obtained nominal allegiance from the greater part of Indo-China and the governors of the outlying provinces of the Chinese Empire. But the period of Pagan's ascendancy was not a great period in Burmese literature. Her capital looked radiant with its golden temples, her kings were learned and powerful, her troops marched in triumph, but Pagan never forgot that no material thing was real, and everything decayed and perished. Therefore, the scholars were interested only in religious themes, and religious themes seldom offer adequate scope for the development of a great literature. Although the clearness of diction and the artistry of the death-song of the royal tutor, Anantathuria, composed while awaiting execution in 1173, indicate that at least a few must have practised the use of the vernacular for non-religious purposes, the efforts of writers in the vernacular were chiefly directed towards the recording of inscriptions, which are still preserved in countless numbers in the pagodas of Pagan.[1] Many of these inscriptions contain good prose. The earlier inscriptions tend to be bombastic through sheer wealth of learning; the scholars of Pagan could not at once learn to control their use of the newly-acquired scholarship, just as the earlier writers of the Renaissance in England failed to restrict their use of learned words. However, after a few decades, the bombastic style gave place to a simpler and more concise diction. In addition to the narrowness of scope offered by religious themes, there was another reason which prevented Pagan,

[1] The death-song is one of the greatest poems in the language and is the oldest non-religious piece of literature existing in Burma. A translation is given in G. E. Harvey, op. cit., p. 55, and another in Tin and Luce, *The Glass Palace Chronicle*, p. 139.

G. E. Harvey, op cit. (p. 70) describes the inscriptions as 'richly human and intensely devout', and he ranks (p. 38) some of Kyanzittha's (1084–1112) inscriptions as literature.

Epigraphia Birmanica, a Government publication, gives the text of the more important inscriptions with translations.

21: Htin Aung E-5 (ca. 1930) 1937 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4

be a perfect art; probably they thought the Burmese, as far as dramatic representation was concerned, to be barbarians. Moreover, many of the Burmese scholars themselves were against any substantial changes in the presentation of the play at their court. They were for borrowings from, and imitations of, the Siamese play, but they held that the model must be kept unchanged and intact. Their scholastic mind was such. The slightest distortion of the model called forth protests. When the Siamese play, *Aindarwuntha*, was translated as *Eenaung*, there was bitter criticism. The hero of the play had two names; the official title *Aindarwuntha* given by the king of the gods, and the palace name of *Eenaung*. The Siamese called their play *Aindarwuntha*, but the Burmese translator called it *Eenaung*, for that name was easier to say. The play was known as *Eenao* (only a slightly different pronunciation of the same name) in Cambodia. All the same, there were protests against the Minister Myawaddi's calling his translation *Eenaungzat*. Therefore, the scenes (of the *Rama* play) were presented in the same sequence as in the original, the characters were the same, and the story remained the same. However, changes were introduced in the actual words of the songs and speeches. Such changes were considered legitimate because such slight modifications were allowed even at the Siamese court, thereby keeping the play fresh. References to the topic of the day at the court, to Burmese ideals and ideas, to the wit of an actor: they naturally caused slight variations. Withal, the tradition of rigid faithfulness to the original remained. The gesture, rather than actual acting and facial expression, was of great importance in the Siamese play, and that the Burmese court rigidly followed. Gesture was of great importance in the Sanskrit drama, and elaborate treatises were written on the various gestures and their meaning. The code of the gesture in the Sanskrit drama was as rigid as it was elaborate. In the Siamese play, it was very much less elaborate, but still very rigid. For example, when Rama left the court of the Malay king, all the courtiers had to pay homage in an elaborate and very formal way. It is difficult to ascertain the reason of the importance of the gesture in the play; the Sanskrit drama may have influenced it; or the Siamese court wished to show to the common people the manners and customs of their king's palace; or maybe where the stage-lighting was extremely bad, facial expression could not be seen, and therefore gesture alone could convey the meaning to the audience, of course, apart from the actual dialogue. However, the importance of the

Zl:. Htin Aung E-5 (ca. 1930) 1937 AP1 Burma
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to be under the direct control of the state. But as living actors were now past such control, he turned his attention towards puppets, which were in great demand by the people. He realized the possibilities of puppets in the newly arisen national drama. The puppet show, which was then entirely independent of the drama and the living actors, started with different animals coming out one by one, and each gave a special dance to a particular tune of its own, played by the orchestra, then a *saugyee*[1] appeared and danced, and finally, a prince and princess came out, made love, sang and danced. The puppets were from 2½ to 3 feet in height, and were worked by strings. As stage, there was a raised platform, with a black curtain, behind which the show-men stood and manipulated the puppets. The men's hands were visible, but as the platform was about four feet high and the audience had to look up, the hands did not distinctly come into the line of vision. The platform was about twenty feet in length, and the width of the part in front of the curtain was about four feet.

536 * 175 [534]

The minister put the puppet show under direct state patronage and control. Under him the puppet show became similar to an ordinary dramatic presentation except that puppets performed instead of living actors. The use of puppets to act the play of course caused the introduction of new puppets, but it also rendered the *saugyee* and animal puppets unnecessary; yet they were retained all

536 * 175 [656]

[1] *Saugyee* is the Burmese term for an alchemist. It is a derivative of the Indian word *yoga* but the Burmese alchemist has little in common with the Indian ascetic. It is an example of how names of Pali and semi-Buddhist origin were applied to already-existing native ideas.

789 822 [198]●

A man (but not a woman) becomes a *saugyee* when he has introduced into his body the right metal-compounds. To obtain those compounds, he has to experiment on metals with quicksilver or iron. In the first case, he becomes a 'quicksilver *saugyee*' and in the second, an 'iron *saugyee*', but both have the same powers. A *saugyee* lives for millions of years, and can travel in the air, in water, or under the earth, for his body has reached the state when it is beyond the ordinary laws of nature. A halfway stage in the experiments is reached when a 'stone of live metal' (equivalent to the medieval 'philosopher's stone') is obtained. A person in actual possession of the stone can fly in the air and travel under the earth, but his powers are entirely dependent on the stone, i.e. his body is still an ordinary human body. The stone turns lead into silver and brass into gold. It will be seen that a Burman striving to become a *saugyee* has much in common with the medieval European alchemist.

The beliefs connected with the *saugyee* are still widely current. For a detailed account of Burmese alchemy, see the writer's 'Alchemy and Alchemists in Burma' in *Folk-Lore*, December 1933.

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25: Ferrars E-5 (ca. 1890) 1901 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4

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883
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[271]

Having made her evening toilet

148. TEA (LEPPEYVE).

the girl takes some light work, such as cotton to roll for the wheel for the hour of *lubyô-hlè*, as the dusk of evening is called, literally, the time of the "bachelors' round." The young men are expected to make short calls only, so as not to keep the old people up late. By "old men's sleeping time," as the hour after the short twilight is called, they must have left, so as to relieve the duenna, who, if not in sight, is always in waiting for the girls to come up into the house for the night. Courtship has quite a language of its own in which the suitor needs to be proficient. Young people of fashion are referred to as *hkla-thá*, *hkla-thamí*—lads and girls "of the period," who cultivate smartness in their speech, bearing and dress. The suitor brings presents of flowers and fruit and ornaments. Oranges, expensively stored one by one, long past the season, are for this sole purpose. Carved

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147. BELLE AT HER TOILET.

148. VILLAGE BELLE.

25; Ferrars E-5 (ca. 1890) 1901 APl Burma
Burmese AP4

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[231]
[439]
[563
198]

207. BRINGING IN ROE-DEER (DYI.

then the bathing-places have to be staked in. Wild elephants make a road dangerous at times. Elephants are captured by pit-falls. Decoys are also used in various ways; small animals are detached from the herd by their means and then kept going until they are worn out, and can be tethered and hobbled for taming. The breaking in is accomplished by pinning the elephant between trees or stout posts where it cannot lie down, keeping it underfed, and giving food as the reward of docility. Young elephants born in captivity—as occasionally happens—are broken in, in the same way, about the sixth year, when half grown. The stock is replenished from Siam, where the wild herds are larger, and the business of catching is more developed, and where also elephants breed more frequently in captivity. The elephant-breakers and trainers are Shans, and the words of command Shan. Rhinoceroses (*kyau*) may be found about the sources of streams in the evergreen hills; occasional tracks are seen. A tapir occurs in the forests of Tenaserim. Wild dogs (*canis rutilans*) occur in a few localities. There is no wolf, fox, or hyæna, and no jackal east of Arakán. There is a larger and a smaller black bear (*ursus*), very rarely encountered, and not aggressive. There are several species of wild cat (*taze-dyaung*) large and small, and a few species of weasel. A small porcupine is found (*pyn*). The huge bamboo-rat (*pauk*) is dug out of its burrow by the hill people. There are many tribes of monkeys and gibbons; the weird cry of the latter is the characteristic sound of the evergreen forest. Squirrels are the only wild animals

208. MEASURING THE PANTHER.

25: Ferrars E-5 (ca. 1890) 1901 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4

212 still is used by the Shans for their sacred MSS. The Burmans use the paper chiefly in the form of stiff tablets (*parabèik*), blackened, like the *thimbôn*, for writing on with a steatite pencil. Burmese type was cut (No. 452) and the first 213 printing-plant set up in Burma by the American Baptist Mission. At present

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[212]
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274. PALM-LEAF MS.

871 there are a number of printing establishments owned by Burmans, from which quite a literature of their religious works has issued. At first the Buddhists of •198 Burma considered print not good enough for the scripture canon. Modernised 203 legends of the Buddha in his previous incarnations (*sat*) are beginning to form the foundation of a romance-literature of indigenous type. Newspapers have not yet taken a firm hold, even in the large towns; but news travels very fast in the ordinary way, especially news about the prices of goods. This western art has not contributed to the spread of western knowledge in the way that might be expected. The Yaw Mindyi, a minister of the late King Mindôn Min, made a most praiseworthy effort to popularise western ideas in a series of MS. treatises. A native undertaking upon a grand scale—nothing less than a Burmese encyclopædia—was on foot in the sixties, but fell through for want of organised support. In Japan, an analogous enterprise was successful. What applies to concerted action in matters like the above, applies equally to political combination. Few Burmans, even after years of schooling, learn enough to read an English newspaper with [212] profit. To this day there is no Burmese manual for the study of English. The scholars learn only enough of the language to procure them employment as accountants and copyists. Similarly, there are few English who can understand a Burmese newspaper.

275. COPYIST AT WORK.

000 Dealers, with the exception of the

25: Ferrars E-5 (ca. 1890) 1901 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4

APPENDIX B.

STRUCTURE OF THE BURMESE LANGUAGE—MODE OF TRANSLITERATION.

212 THE Burmese alphabet is a model of classification. The vowels and consonants form separate orders, with sub-orders. The force of each letter is conveyed in its name. The name consists of two parts, the generic and the specific. The latter describes the form of the letter by its resemblance to some familiar object; for instance *ka-zindu*—elephant-fetter *ka* (ဃ). Sentences are punctuated, but the words are written—from left to right—without separation. The horizontal line of characters consists mainly of the consonants, the characters added above and below the line denote the vowels. The Burmese is all Burmese just as German is all German. The meaning of a compound word is as obvious as the meaning of *durch-sichtig* is in German and *trans-parens* is in Latin. A new root which one has learned in its function of substantive may be used as verb and adjective upon one unvarying model. The forms of speech have tended to preserve related ideas in the same categories as the terms expressing the ideas. The Burman has no equivalents for our "herb, shrub, tree." He speaks of "grain-plants, creeper-plants, timber-plants." The root idea is conveyed by a monosyllable. The disuse of mute consonants in the spoken language greatly reduces the number of available combinations of sounds by which to differentiate monosyllables. A tonic system of vowels and the aspiration of labial and dental as well as of liquid consonants, help to multiply the possible combinations. Context comes to the aid of these subtle distinctions. Prefixes and suffixes of universal application indicate the parts of speech in their syntax and their inflexions. The numeral affixes proper to various classes of objects are of a curious prolixity. Just as we say *pair*, *couple*, *brace*, so one of twenty or more different affixes has to be employed with the number, according to the nature of the object. Secondary meanings are obtained by a free compounding of words. The language possesses terms for ideas of much subtlety and complexity; but metaphysical terms are imported from the Pâli, the language of Buddhist philosophy. The pronunciation of the Pâli is adapted to that of the Burmese. Thus *Samanera* becomes *Chinthamánî*. Sanskrit, which is studied by few, presents still greater difficulties to the Burman. The word for Sanskrit is corrupted into *Thinthakyéit*. The terseness of the language appears in its proverbs. For

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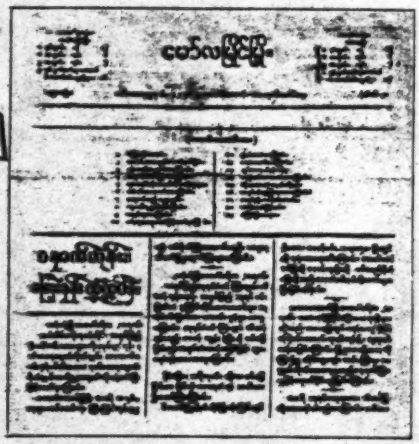

455. BURMESE LETTERPRESS (NEWSPAPER, p. 124).

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29: Slater M-4 (no date) 1951 APl Burma
Burmese AP4

CHAPTER II

BUDDHISM AND ANIMISM IN BURMA

1. Animism or Buddhism?

It never occurred to anybody, remarked the Burmese critic quoted in our previous chapter, that the best way to find out what Nirvana meant was to consider its significance in some present, living tradition of Buddhism. His criticism was apposite in its immediate reference. As a matter of fact, however, it was precisely this course which *did* occur to Bishop Bigandet a century ago, as his voluminous footnotes to his translation of the Burmese Legend of Gaudama show.[1] The same may be said of his predecessor in the field, Father Sangermano, and of several successors.[2] Our present purpose is to take up the task where they left it. We hope to describe Buddhism in Burma in sufficient detail to exhibit the essentially religious character of the Nirvana paradox.

Since the context is Burmese and the reference is to Hīnayāna or Southern Buddhism, Nirvana for the time being will be *Nibbāna*, which is its form in the Pali language of the Hīnayāna scriptures. In Burmese, Nibbāna is Nebban.

One reason, perhaps, why this approach to the subject has been largely disregarded by Western scholars in recent years is the prevalent impression that the popular religion in Burma is a syncretism in which the dominant element is not Buddhism, but Animism. "Hinayana," writes Dr. Bouquet, in an outline of Comparative Religion, "is still 'the little vehicle,' because it does not and cannot appeal to the masses of any population.... It is true that it is the Buddhism of Burma and Ceylon. But anyone who knows these countries is well aware that the real popular faith of their peoples is not Hinayana but a thinly veiled animism."[3]

[1] Rt. Rev. P. Bigandet, Bishop of Ramatha, *The Life or Legend of Gaudama, the Buddha of the Burmese*, first published in Rangoon 1858.

[2] Father Vincentius Sangermano, *The Burmese Empire*, first published in 1833.

[3] A. C. Bouquet, *Comparative Religion*, new ed., 1945, p. 129. Dr. J. B. Pratt's balanced estimate of the Burma situation in his *The Pilgrimage of Buddhism* (1928) should have done something to correct this impression.